

Cause & Effect

Definitions and Signal Words



Cause: an event or action that makes something happen (It tells us why something happened).

Effect: a change that results from a cause (It tells us what happened).

Cause and Effect relationships are the heart and soul of most storytelling (short stories, novels - fiction). IN fact, a story can't really happen without them. These relationships may be explicit (stated) or only hinted at, but they are vital to the progress of any story.

Nonfiction relies on cause-and-effect relationships as well, but they are usually discussed more explicitly. Editorials and persuasive essays use facts and arguments to affect and change your opinion or behavior. History and Science articles illustrate how certain events or facts cause other things to happen.

A cause-and-effect relationship works like a row of dominos. When one domino falls down, it makes the next one fall down - a chain reaction. Similarly, events in a text cause other events to happen.

Particular signal words are often used to announce cause-and-effect relationships. When you find these words in your reading, you should highlight them. Some of the signal words you should look for are:

Signal Words Indicating Cause:

because
the reason for
led to
was responsible for
contributes to
on account of

because of
since
on account of
produced
brings about
in order to

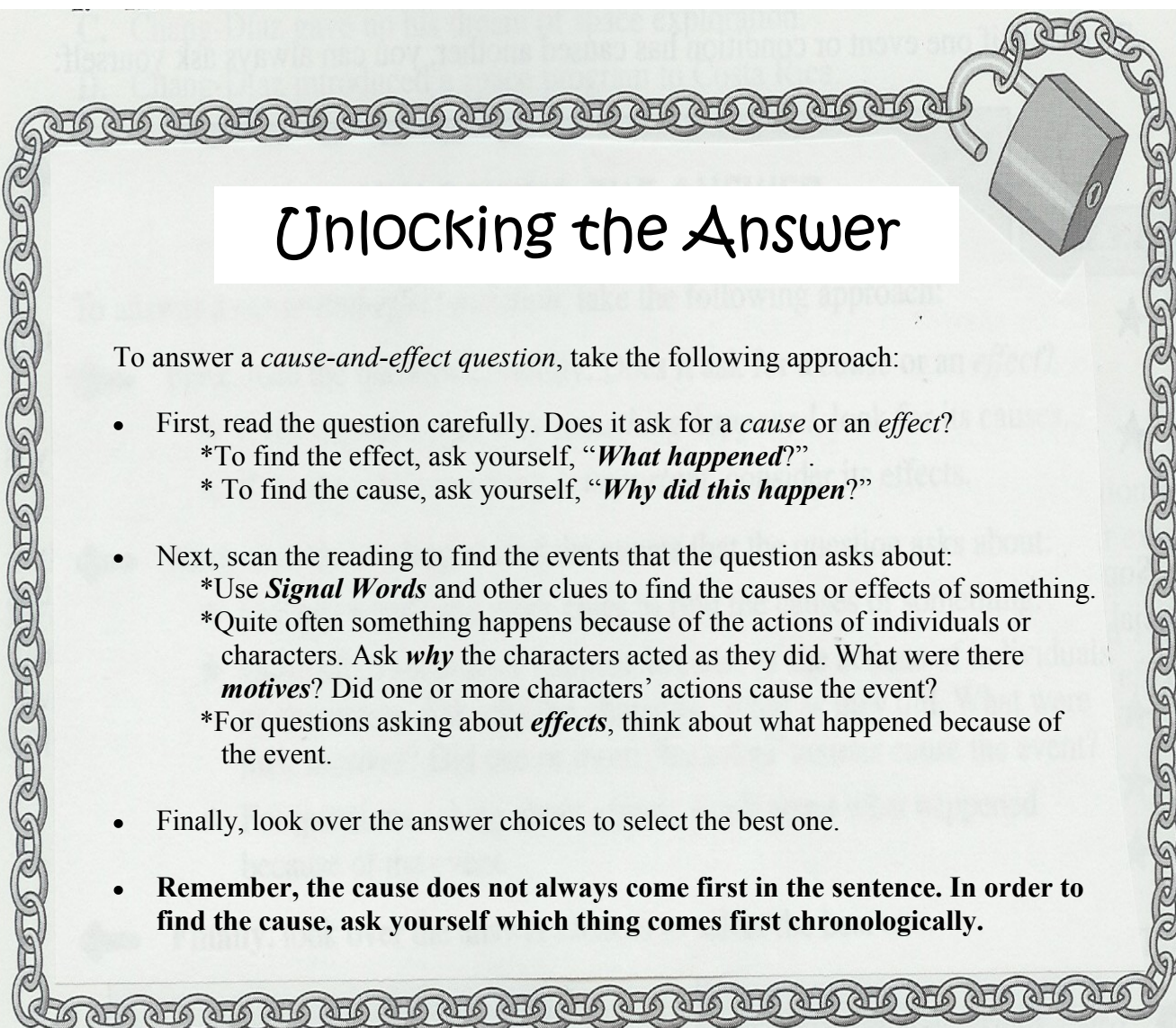
created by
caused by
due to
influence
makes or makes happen

Signal Words Indicating Effect:

since
therefore
consequently
outcome
hence

so
then
as a result of
subsequently
and so

finally
thus
for this reason
it follows that
as a consequence



Unlocking the Answer

To answer a *cause-and-effect* question, take the following approach:

- First, read the question carefully. Does it ask for a *cause* or an *effect*?
 - *To find the effect, ask yourself, “***What happened?***”.
 - * To find the cause, ask yourself, “***Why did this happen?***”
- Next, scan the reading to find the events that the question asks about:
 - *Use ***Signal Words*** and other clues to find the causes or effects of something.
 - *Quite often something happens because of the actions of individuals or characters. Ask ***why*** the characters acted as they did. What were there ***motives***? Did one or more characters’ actions cause the event?
 - *For questions asking about ***effects***, think about what happened because of the event.
- Finally, look over the answer choices to select the best one.
- **Remember, the cause does not always come first in the sentence. In order to find the cause, ask yourself which thing comes first chronologically.**

Sample Cause & Effect Relationships:

1. Because she loves birds, Nicole has planned a trip to the Parrot Jungle in South Miami.

Effect: (what happened?) Nicole has planned a trip to the Parrot Jungle.

Cause: (why?) She loves birds.

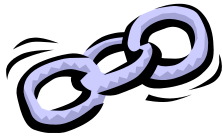
signal word: because

2. Jason and Maria brought plenty of insect repellent when they went hiking in the Everglades, since they knew there would be large numbers of mosquitoes there.

Effect: (what happened?) Jason and Maria brought plenty of insect repellent on their hike.

Cause: (why?) There are many mosquitoes there.

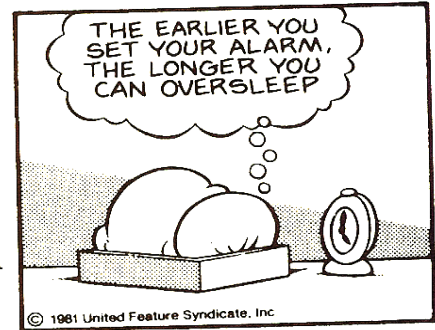
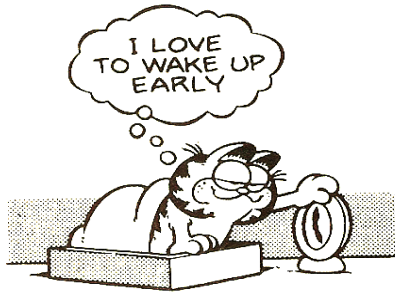
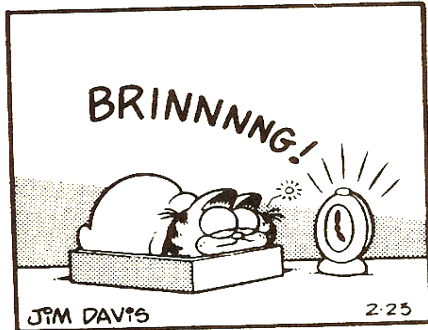
signal word: since



Practicing Cause & Effect

Name _____

GARFIELD by Jim Davis



Read each sentence carefully. For each, identify one cause and one effect. The first one is done for you.

Cause

Effect

1. I was out of money, so I stopped at the bank.

out of money

went to the bank

2. Jim stayed home because he was afraid to fly.

3. The hurricane's strong wind shattered the window.

4. After the car accident, Marie always wore a seat belt.

5. The movie was so scary that Ron slept with the light on.

6. The dinosaur's extinction might have resulted from an asteroid.

7. The rickety bridge collapsed under the truck's weight.

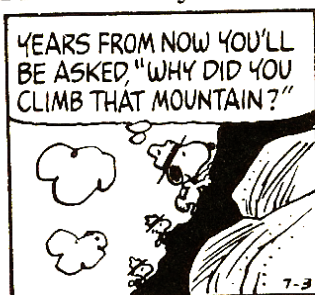
8. Sparky's barking kept Sarah awake all night.



Practicing Cause & Effect

Name _____

PEANUTS by Charles Schulz



Cause & Effect Practice #1:

At one time, the autumn air used to be thick with the smell of burning leaves. Piles of them, orange, yellow, and brown, lined the curbs of neighborhood streets. While they burned, the smoke filled the air with a distinctive scent. Inside, the houses were warmed by burning logs. The smoke from the fireplaces wafted up the chimneys, joining the smoke from the leaves and making a wonderful autumn haze.

Then it was discovered that the smoke was polluting the air. Many parts of the country banned the burning of fall leaves. Fireplace fires were discouraged. Unfortunately, one kind of pollution is replacing another. Now the sound of leaf blowers disturbs the fall calm.

1. According to the story, why don't people burn leaves anymore?
 - A. The fires are dangerous.
 - B. The smoke pollutes the air
 - C. Leaf blowers are much better.
 - D. They burned them in the fireplaces.

Cause & Effect Practice #2:

Denzel was getting bad grades in math. He liked math, but he never quite got it. He was a good student otherwise. His parents were understanding, but they told him he needed to do better or he wouldn't be able to play basketball after school.

Frederick, a boy in Denzel's class, was great at math. He wasn't so good at basketball. Denzel offered to trade lessons. He would help Frederick play basketball better if Frederick would help him learn math. They made an agreement, and it worked. Denzel's math grades shot up. In a little while, Denzel and Frederick were playing basketball together after school.

1. What was the effect of the agreement made by Denzel and Frederick?
 - A. Denzel was punished for his poor math grades.
 - B. Frederick made money as a tutor.
 - C. Each learned something from the other.
 - D. They started playing basketball on the school team.

Cause & Effect Practice #3:

The castor tree happened accidentally. An old castor tree was growing in the yard of our neighbors across the alley. One summer some of its seeds got into our yard, and the following summer we had a small castor tree of our own. It was a spurious sort of a tree, growing much too rapidly and being much too delicate for a tree. A small boy couldn't climb it and the least little storm that came along would tear some of its branches away. But it had a nice leaf and a clean growing odor and it made a lot of shade.

—from “The Broken Wheel” by William Saroyan

- 3. Why did the castor tree grow in the narrator's yard?
 - A. It was actually growing in his neighbor's alley.
 - B. A storm tore off some branches.
 - C. His father planted it.
 - D. A seed from a neighbor's tree took root and grew.

Cause & Effect Practice #4:

In the sandy Sahara Desert, a place that is fertile and green because of an underground stream is called an oasis. It is only at an oasis that a person who travels across the Sahara can find water. In the Sahara, however, windstorms are almost as great a danger as the shortage of water. Windstorms change the surface of the desert continually. The wind blows sand into waves and peaks, leaving valleys where there were once sand dunes and changing flat areas into hill areas. Because the surface of the desert is changing all the time, there are no landmarks; travelers need to guide themselves by the stars at night and rest during the hot daylight hours.

- 4. Why are windstorms a greater danger than water shortage in the Sahara?
